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Senate passes anti-immigrant legislation

Senate Bill 4 forces El Paso County to choose between a federal settlement agreement and loss of state funds

Austin – Sen. José Rodríguez, Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus, issued the following statement on today's Senate passage of Senate Bill 4:

The Senate today took the final step in passing S.B. 4, a thinly disguised attack on immigrant communities. This legislation disregards the separation of powers that is necessary for different jurisdictions to fulfill their roles in adherence with the Constitution. Immigrant communities are among the safest in the country, and law enforcement officers have testified that forcing them to take on the federal role of immigration police is counterproductive to public safety.

Opponents of the bill offered numerous amendments to decrease the negative impacts it will have on the health, safety, and social life of communities such as El Paso, the safest big city of its size in the country, and to reduce the likelihood this legislation will result in costly liability for affected entities, which is almost every jurisdiction that has commissioned officers, from cities to health providers to water districts. The vast majority were not accepted.

This includes an amendment I offered in order to exclude El Paso County, which is under a settlement entered in federal court not to do things that are mandated by S.B. 4. Essentially, should S.B. 4 become law in its current form, the author of the bill has guaranteed a costly lawsuit for El Paso, which must choose between a federal settlement agreement and compliance with state law.

It is clear to me that this is not about public safety. It is about sending a message that immigrants, whether they are legal permanent residents waiting for citizenship, undocumented migrants seeking to join their families, or refugees looking for a chance at a better life, are not welcome.

A look at the amendments offered

- Exemption for local mental health authorities
- Exemption for local public health departments
- Broaden and clarify the exemption for witnesses and victims of crimes
- Exempt entities that have a court order prohibiting federal immigration enforcement
- Removal of the provision that allows peace officers to ask about immigration solely for the purpose of enforcing immigration law if providing “assistance to” federal law enforcement, which was found unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Water and Rural Affairs (Vice Chair); Natural Resources and Economic Development; Transportation, and Veterans Affairs and Border Security.